

Berlin student center halts German army advertising campaign

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The administrative council of the Berlin student center (StuWe) decided at its last meeting on March 9 not to accept any advertising from the German army at any of Berlin's universities until further notice. A final decision on the matter is to be taken at its next meeting in July.

In the lead-up to the meeting, several student representative bodies at Berlin's Humboldt University (HU) and Free University (FU) voted in favour of banning advertising from the German army and for military purposes within Berlin university buildings.

The decision was triggered by an advertising campaign for the army's medical service, which was displayed in the canteen at the HU's northern campus in November and December. The campus is next to the university's Charité hospital, meaning that many medical students are regular visitors.

A large section of the student body at the campus opposed the advertisements. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at HU subsequently introduced a motion in the student parliament rejecting German army advertising at universities in Berlin, which was adopted by a large majority in November.

The administrative council is the highest decision-making body of the StuWe, which not only operates canteens and student accommodation, but also administers student loans and advisory services for the Berlin student body. Meeting twice a year, the council is composed of 14 members: half of the positions are filled by student representatives from Berlin's universities and the other half by officials from the Berlin State Senate, university management and the StuWe.

According to participants in the meeting who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*, the student

representatives introduced a motion in which they asked how much income the StuWe had obtained from the German army adverts it had displayed. In addition, they cited the decision of HU's student parliament, which declared, "The student parliament opposes all forms of advertising for the German army at our university and calls on the Berlin Student Center and university management not to permit any advertising for the army on the HU campus."

In addition, the student representatives made the demand at the meeting that the advertising guidelines for the StuWe be changed to ban in principle all advertising for the army or for military purposes at Berlin's universities, as had been called for by the HU student parliament and the FU's general student committee (Asta).

According to information from the business managers, the StuWe secured a profit of just €190 for the advertisements, which were displayed for three weeks. This corresponds to the standard cost of advertising secured by the firm CAMPUSdirekt.

The decision on the second and central demand made by the student representatives, the changing of the advertising guidelines, was postponed until the next meeting of the administrative council by the meeting's chair--with a reference to the order of business because a written motion had not been submitted in time. The discussion indicated that there was a majority on the Administrative Council in favour of the change.

Reacting to the widespread opposition among students to the army's advertising, the council pledged not to approve any further advertisements for the army until a final decision on the matter has been made by the Administrative Council in July.

The interim decision by the Administrative Council represents a significant victory for students in Berlin.

The decision amounts to a slap in the face for HU President Sabine Kunst. At a meeting of the academic senate in December, she presumptuously stated she could see no reason why advertisements for the army should be banned at Berlin's universities. The army was after all an organisation in conformity with the Federal Republic's constitutional order, she asserted to the students present. She went on to praise the career prospects in the army, which were very wide-ranging, "from trainee medics to teachers, social workers and heaven knows what else."

At this point, the student parliament at her university had already supported the banning of army advertising by a large majority. This was followed in January and February by other student representative bodies, which expressed themselves no less decisively.

"We call on the Berlin Student Center and those responsible at FU Berlin to change their advertising guidelines going forward so that advertising for the arms industry and military (and therefore also advertising for the army) will not be permitted. [...] We support a Free University that is a research and educational establishment of peace," stated the decision of the FU student parliament on February 2.

This decision was confirmed by the FU Asta in its own press release. Fabian Bennewitz, a member of the university politics department, placed the rearming of the army in the context of the social cuts which have resulted in horrific consequences for the health sector, commenting, "It is particularly cynical for the army to boast [on its advertising placards] about being well armed and equipped with doctors who allegedly do not fight for profits. This only seems credible because the facilities in hospitals like the Charité continue to deteriorate due to a lack of public investment, privatisation and the focus on profit-maximisation in the health sector associated with this."



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